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Corruption in Northern Kosovo

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Note:

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Introduction

As part of the project “Enhancing Institutional Response to Corruption in northern Kosovo”, Advocacy Center for Democratic Culture (ACDC) conducted a survey on the perception and attitude of citizens about the state of corruption.

This research aimed to assess the perception of corruption in the northern municipalities as well as the attitude of citizens to the impact of the corruption on local institutions. The survey was conducted in four (4) municipalities in northern Kosovo (North Mitrovica, Zvečan, Zubin Potok, and Leposavić) in the period from November 18th to December 5th, 2021, on a sample of 400 respondents.

The measuring instrument was designed in the form of a survey questionnaire to collect the following categories of data: 1) socio-demographic data; 2) the level of satisfaction with the services provided by local self-governments in the municipalities covered by the survey; 3) assessment of transparency in the work of institutions, 4) attitude of citizens about the presence of corruption in public institutions.

In addition to the questionnaire, during the research, 3 focus groups were organized with members of 4 municipalities in the north. The participants were municipal workers, members of civil society as well as ordinary citizens. The focus groups aimed to obtain more accurate information on the state of corruption in northern Kosovo. The data obtained is processed by descriptive statistical analysis.

Research Methodology

The research included a combination of several methodological methods, qualitative and quantitative, through the implementation of online surveys, focus groups, analysis of available reports, sources, and research conducted in the period from 2018 to 2022. The survey was conducted through the Google platform and included 406 respondents, based on a stratified representative random sample by place of residence. The focus groups included representatives of local governments in northern Kosovo, civil society organizations, judicial institutions, citizens, and the media. Questionnaire data were processed in Google Data Analysis, while a focus group narrative report was used for data obtained from focus groups.

Method of research: Internet survey and focus groups¹

Place of research: North Mitrovica, Zvečan, Zubin Potok and Leposavić

Research time: November 18th - December 5th, 2021

Sample size: 406 respondents

Sample description: Out of a total of 406 respondents, 41% of respondents are male, and 59% are female.

Sample type: Stratified representative random sample, based on the municipality of residence

Poststratification: Age, level of education, and employment status

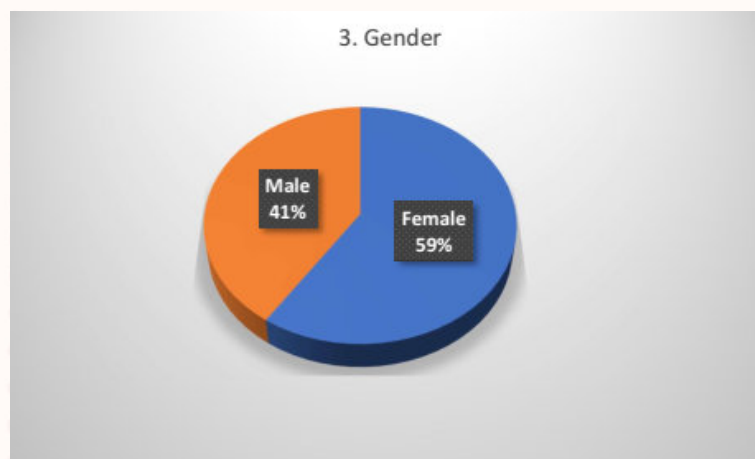
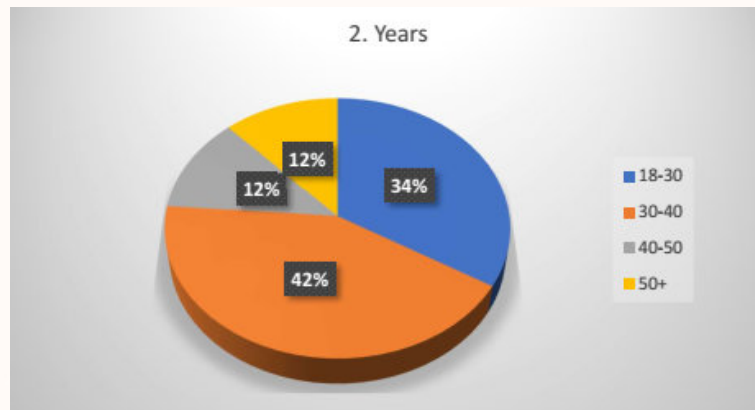
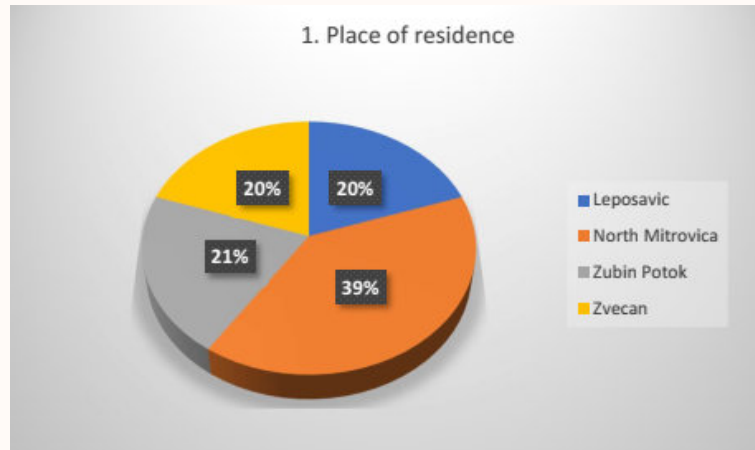
¹ Focus groups were held in North Mitrovica on 17th, 22nd and 26th November 2021.

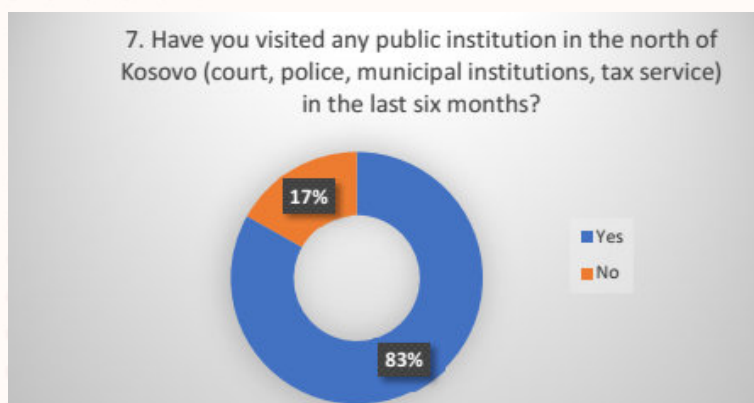
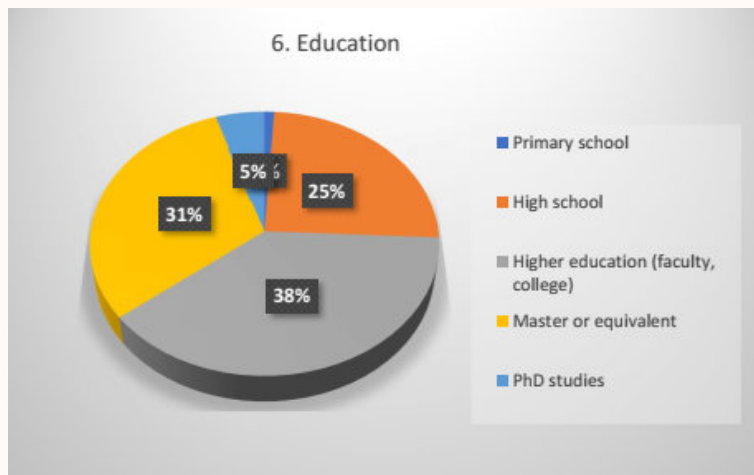
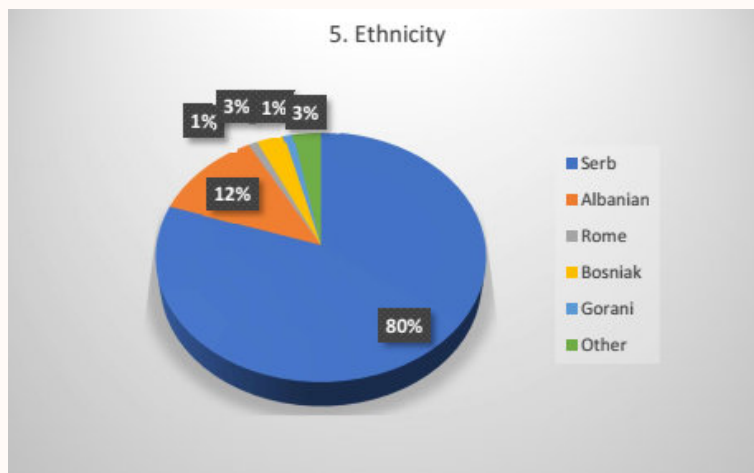
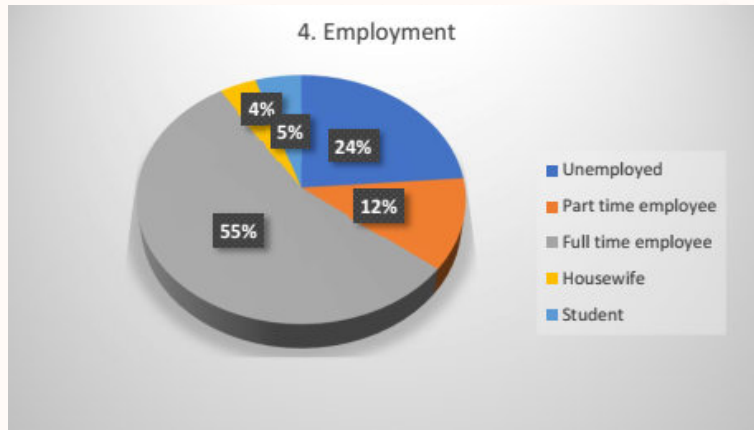
Key Results

- 49% of respondents answered that they were forced to pull some strings or pay for a service afterward
- 39% would report corruption if they encountered it in one of the institutions in northern Kosovo
- 38% of respondents think that criminal liability would be most effective in combating bribery and corruption

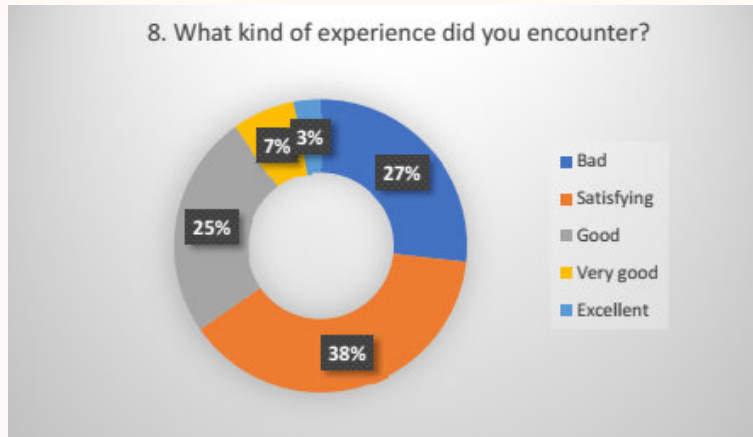
Research Summary - Perception of Key Issues

Demographics

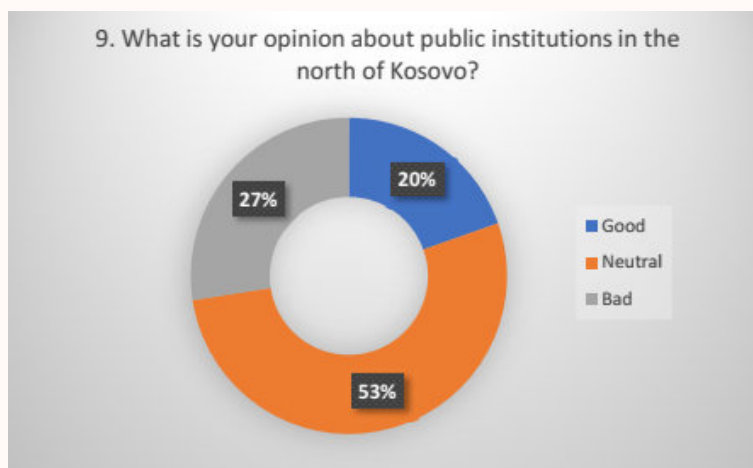




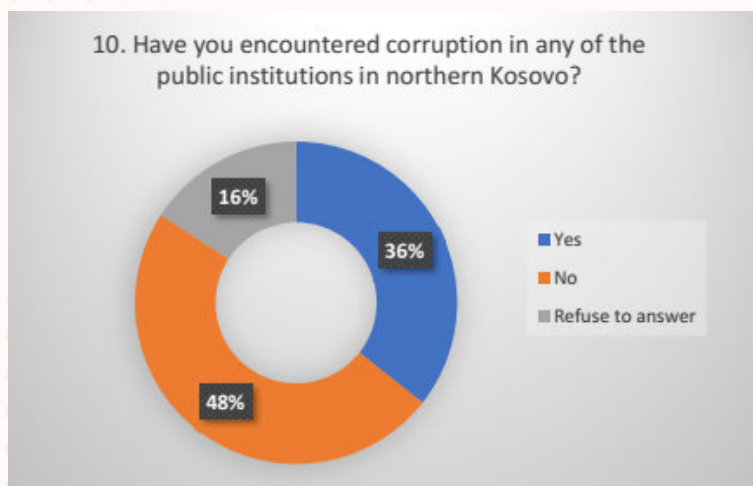
Citizens regularly use the services of public institutions, up to 83%, while 17% answered that they did not visit public institutions, i.e., that they did not need to visit them. This chart shows the need of citizens for the services of public institutions.



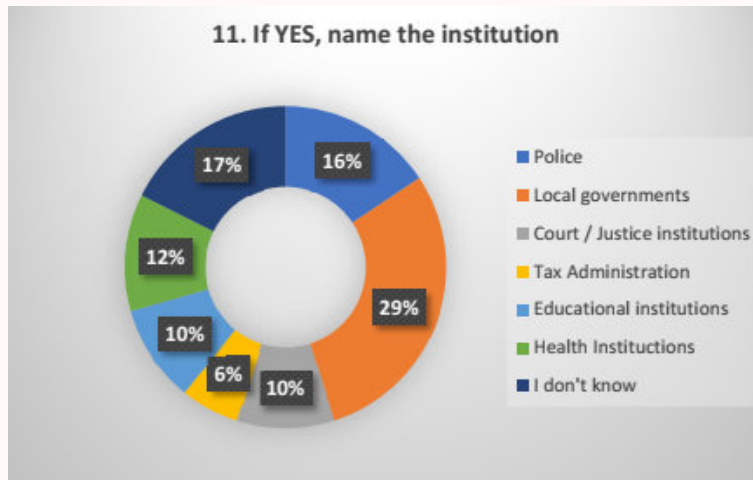
When asked what kind of experience they have encountered, the largest number of citizens answered satisfactorily, 38% of respondents. What seems worrying in this chart is that the citizens put "bad experience" in second place, 27%, "good" 25%, while there were the least excellent experiences, only 3%. The large gap between "satisfactory" and "excellent experience" i.e., the approximate values of "bad" and "good experiences" shows that the experience of citizens is not at the highest possible level.



When asked for their opinion on institutions, the citizens answered: "neutral", up to 53%, "bad" 27%, and "good" only 20%. Apart from pointing out the connection with the previous question, these data show that citizens do not have a high opinion of public institutions, which indicates the need to bring institutions closer to citizens. As it is not emphasized which area is meant, it is considered that institutions need to improve the approach, the services, and the way they work.

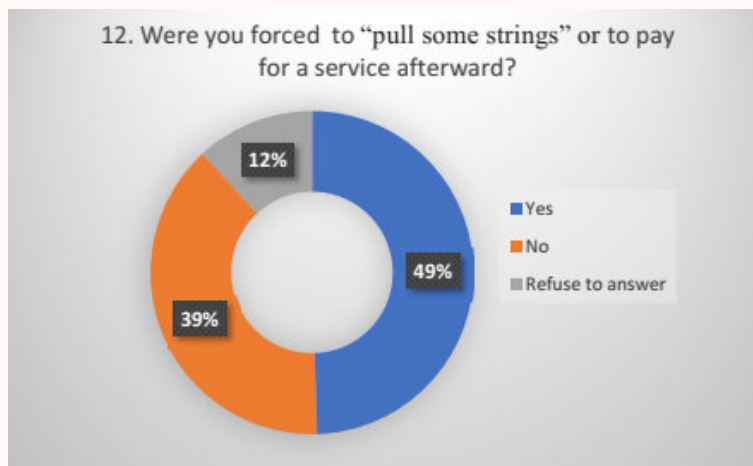


This question was answered negatively by almost half of the respondents, more precisely 48%, while 36% answered in the affirmative. 16% refused to answer this question. Half of the respondents stated that they did not encounter corruption in public institutions, which encourages further work with institutions in order to reduce the number of encounters with corruption and increase the efficiency of local institutions.

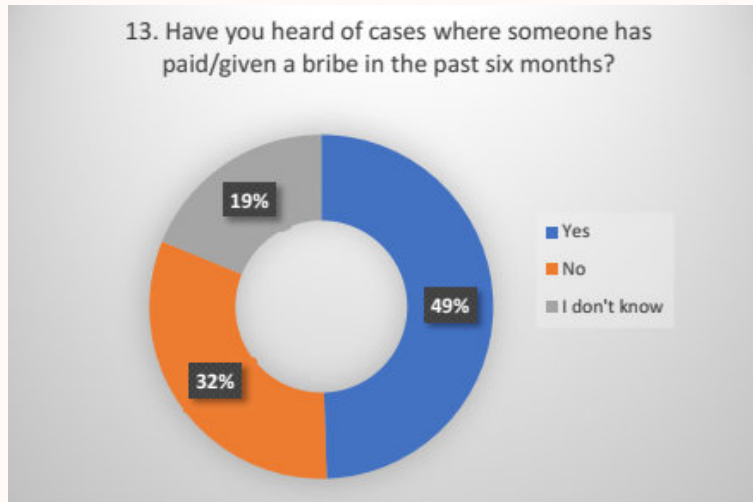


Respondents who answered affirmative to the previous question were asked to specifically choose the institution they were referring to. The highest portion went to the municipality, which implies that citizens think that they most often encounter corruption in that institution, that it is the most common found in the work of the municipality. In the second place, there is the police, while the third place is shared by judicial and educational institutions.

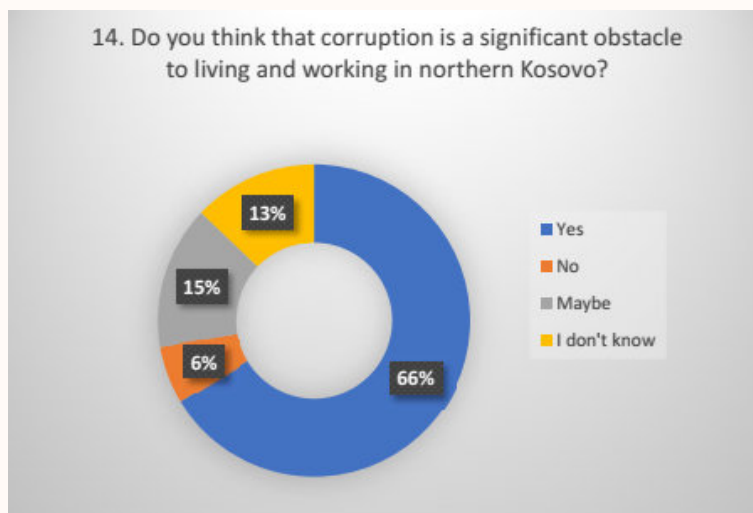
Similar data were obtained in the focus groups. When asked what the problem with the police was, most of the focus group participants emphasized that the traffic control sector was the one where they encountered corruption the most.



To this question, almost half of the respondents, 49%, answered that they were in a situation to pay for a service afterward or were forced to look for some sort of connection with staff employed in a particular institution to get their job done, 39% answered negatively, and 12% refused to answer this question. The large percentage shown in this chart indicates the need for intensified work with local institutions. In the focus groups, participants added that, in addition to the fact that most of them believe that personal liaisons and bribery (in form of gifting) are deeply rooted in the culture of the Balkans, little work has been done on this topic to change the perception of the population and to show the long-term consequences of corruption.

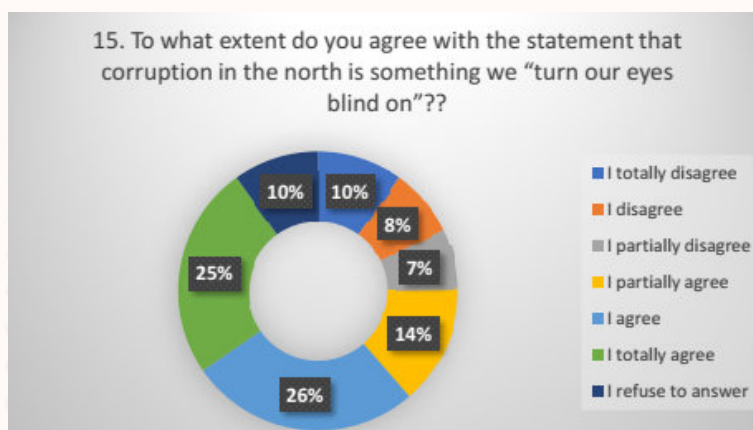


The results on indirect experiences from the environment are similar. 49% of respondents said they had heard of bribery and corruption cases, while 32% had not heard of such cases. 19% said they did not know the answer to this question. Focus group responses confirmed these results.



This question was answered affirmatively by 66% of respondents, which shows a unique view of the situation from the perspective of citizens, and only 6% of respondents said that corruption is not a significant obstacle to living and working in northern Kosovo. 15% answered with "maybe", while 13% answered with "I don't know".

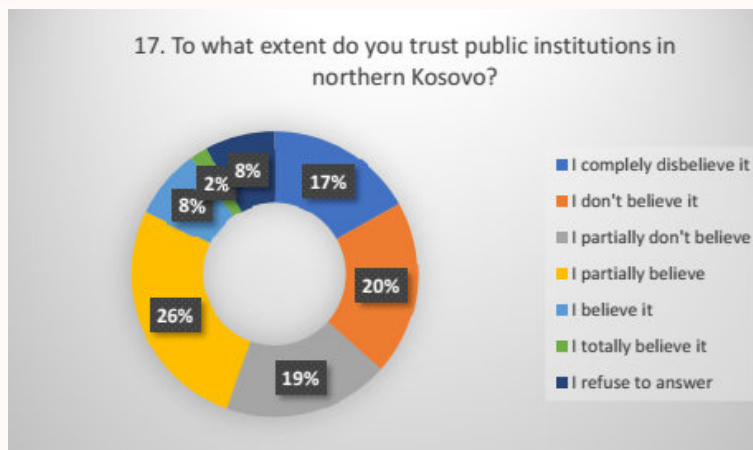
From this chart, we can see that citizens are aware of the potential consequences in the future and clearly understand the impact of corruption.



From the attached chart, we can see that the majority of respondents agree with the statement in part or in full, 65%. Focus group participants also concluded that corruption is a deep-rooted habit of the people of the Balkans, regardless of the country in which they live.



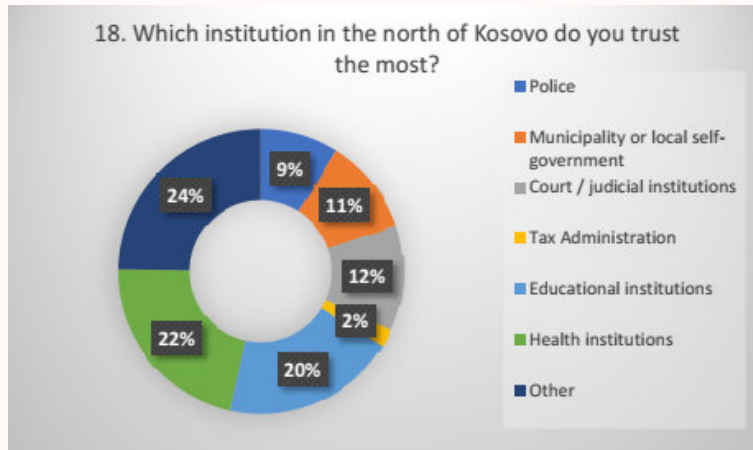
The graph shows that the vast majority of respondents agreed that the phenomenon of corruption in public institutions is completely unacceptable, 81%, while only 2% answered that it is completely tolerable for them. 10% of respondents did not want to answer this question. The results of this question show a great awareness of the harmfulness of corruption and that citizens are aware of it.



The trust of the citizens was distributed as follows:

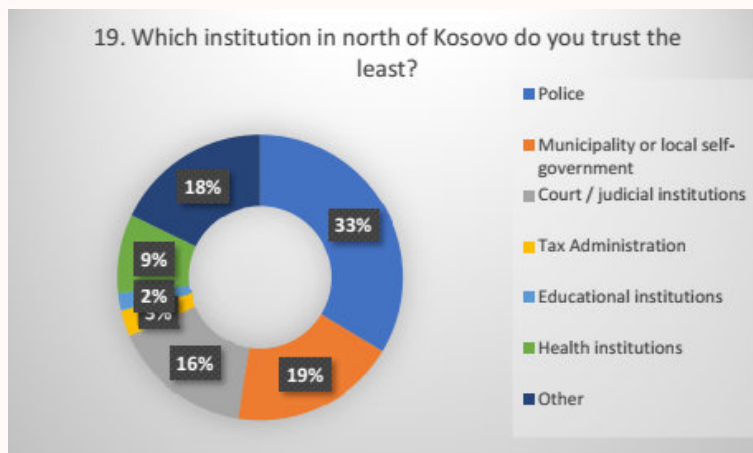
I completely do not believe 17%, I do not believe 20%, I partially do not believe 19%, I partially believe 26%, I believe 8%, I completely believe only 2%, and 8% did not want to answer this question. Insight into these data tells us that in addition to working to reduce corruption, we should also work on involving citizens in the work of institutions to increase the level of trust.

Focus group participants stressed that trust in institutions is not strong because they are relatively young, and that is the reason the system is not fully functional. One group of the participants stated that they do not trust because they believe that they do not work in the interest of minorities in Kosovo.

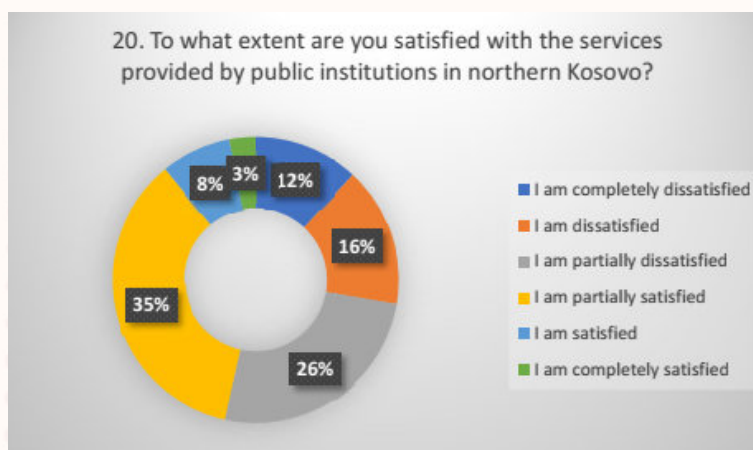


When it comes to the institution in which citizens have the most trust, the highest percentage answered health institutions with 22%, followed by educational institutions with 20%, then judicial institutions with 12%, local self-government with 11%, police with 9%, and least percentage in tax administration 2%. It is alarming that 24% of the respondents stated that they have the most trust in another institution besides the above-mentioned.

In addition to the fact that reliance is hard to gain and maintain, the results show that institutions need to bring themselves closer to citizens to increase trust.



The answers to this question concur with the previous one, so the institution in which citizens have the least trust is the police with 33%, followed by municipalities with 19%, judiciary with 16%, health with 9%, tax administration with 3%, educational institutions with 2% and 18% of respondents stated that they have the least trust in another institution. In addition to this, focus group participants stated that the least trust in this institution (police) is due to the traffic control sector, but also the border police, and also because of the poor integration of the police system. As the highest percentage in this chart goes to the police and the municipality, establishing trust among these institutions should be imperative for these institutions.



When it comes to contentment with the services provided by public institutions, citizens responded in the following way:

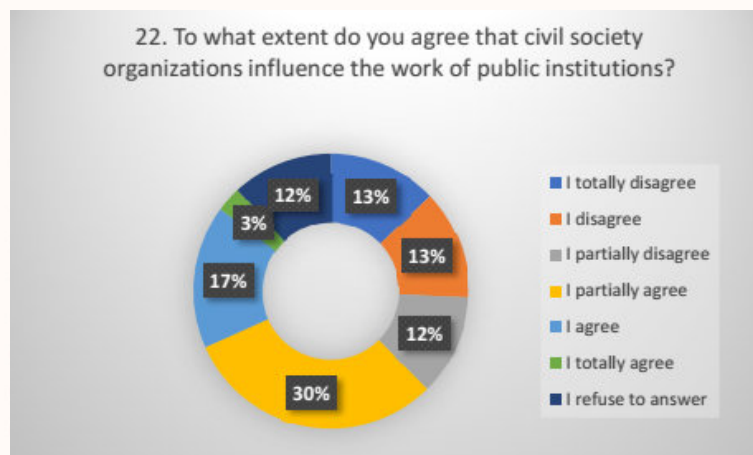
"I am completely dissatisfied" with 12%, "dissatisfied" with 16%, partially dissatisfied with 26%, while "partially satisfied" with 35%, "satisfied" with 8%, while "completely satisfied" with the services of public institutions is by far the least 3%. These data support the fact that there is a gap between institutions, the services they provide, and citizens on the other side who feel some sort of dissatisfaction. Since the highest percentage goes to the "partial" (satisfied and dissatisfied) it can be said with certainty that the institutions need slight improvement to turn that percentage in favor of citizens.



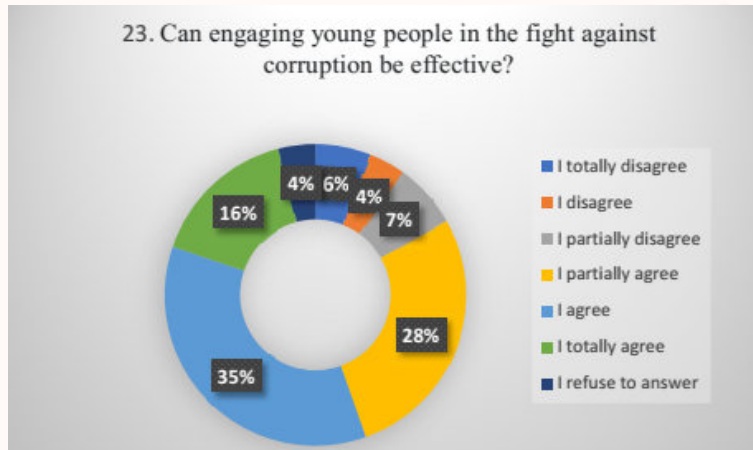
Respondents commented on the measure of informing citizens adequately about the work of institutions in the following way:

19% totally disagree, 22% disagree, 16% partially disagree, 22% partially agree, 11% agree, while again the lowest percentage of citizens who think that institutions inform adequately about their work is only 3%, while 7% refused to answer. This chart shows us that more than half of the citizens have either a completely negative or a somewhat negative assessment of informing the citizens.

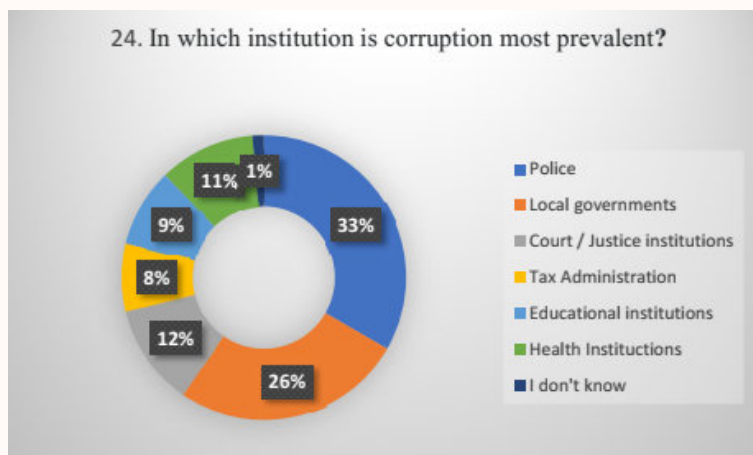
These data coincide with the data obtained from focus groups and emphasize the need for better communication between local institutions and citizens. The focus groups praised the work of North Mitrovica in this area due to its presence on social networks where actions and work are presented, which potentially ensures the visibility of the work and results of the municipality.



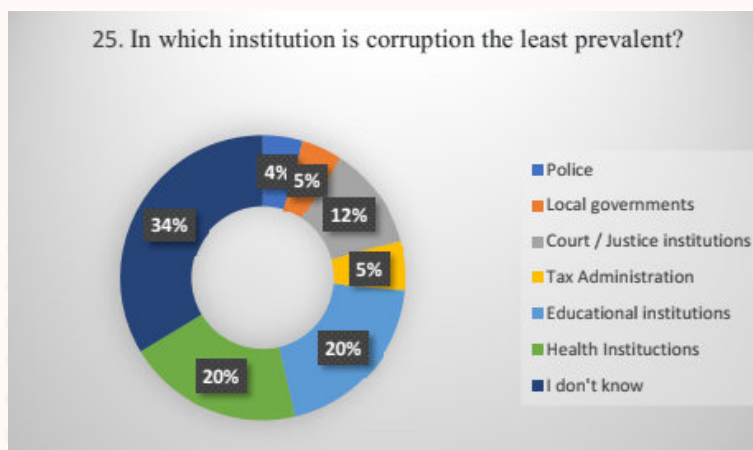
The attached chart shows that 38.7% of respondents do not, partially or totally, believe that civil society can influence the work of public institutions, as 50% believe that organizations can affect the work of public institutions. Focus group participants declared that there are few active CSOs with credibility that could affect the performance of institutions, which can serve as an invitation for active and better cooperation in becoming and remaining a bridge between citizens and institutions.



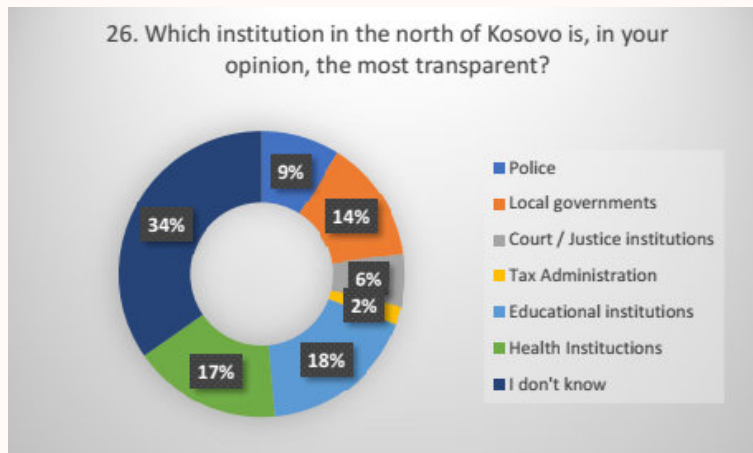
76.2% of respondents said that they fully or partially agree that engaging young people can be effective in fighting corruption. This result calls on young people to act but also indicates to institutions the path they should take, and that is, to engage more young people in their activities. The participants from the focus groups remarked that young people are not given enough chance and that the current system does not care about their needs, thus does not recognize their potential. It has also been emphasized that more work must be done with the women's population in empowering them so they can participate in decision-making processes.



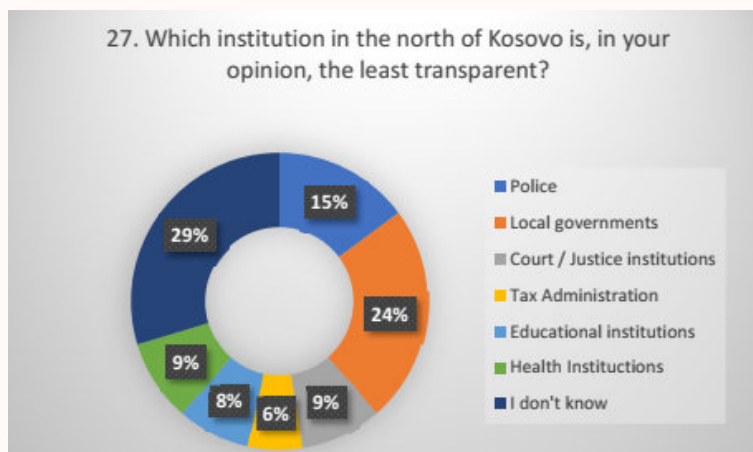
According to these responses, the police is a leading institution with this issue with 33%, while the municipality is in second place with 26% and the court in third place with 12%. Other institutions are also listed, but these three occupy the highest percentage, which shows the citizens' view about their work. Focus groups analyzed these institutions in detail and criticized the police for the high level of corruption in the traffic control sector and border police due to many cases of smuggling and illegal activities. Public procurements, tender issues, lack of information of importance were the main topics regarding the municipality. As for the court, it was mentioned that some cases were resolved outside the courtroom. All these examples cause concern, but also serve as a warning for institutions because they show that citizens notice their weaknesses.



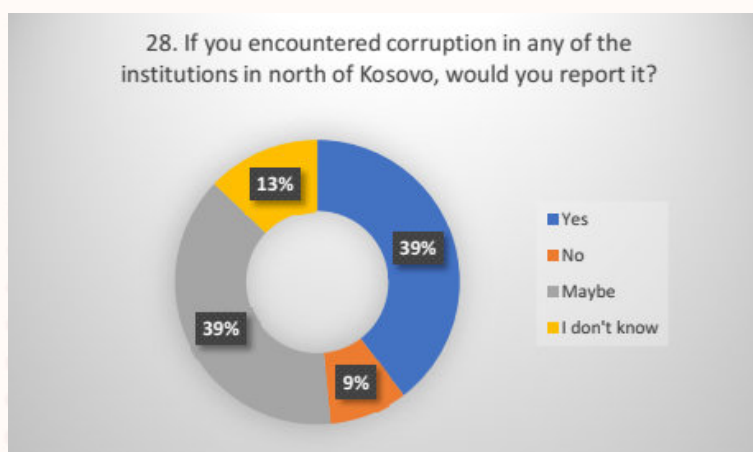
Citizens cited health and education institutions as the ones in which corruption is least prevalent, with approximate percentages. The police, the municipality, and the court received the lowest estimates, which is in line with the previous schedule. Surprisingly, the largest portion of this question falls under the "I don't know" option, which speaks of the indecision of citizens to choose the most uncorrupted institution.



When it comes to the issue of transparency, health and educational institutions are rated the best, while the municipality is in third place. The responses of the focus group participants are in line with this research and they had also assessed these institutions as transparent in their work and activities to some degree. In this question, as well as the previous one, the highest percentage was picked up by the "I don't know" option, 34%.



As the least transparent institution, the respondents pointed to the municipality with 24%, followed by the police with 15%, and other institutions with a smaller percentage. Asked by the focus groups why they think so, the participants said that the case with the municipality refers to the publication of tender documents and public calls, while for the police, it refers to not publishing important cases or giving media insight into important investigations.



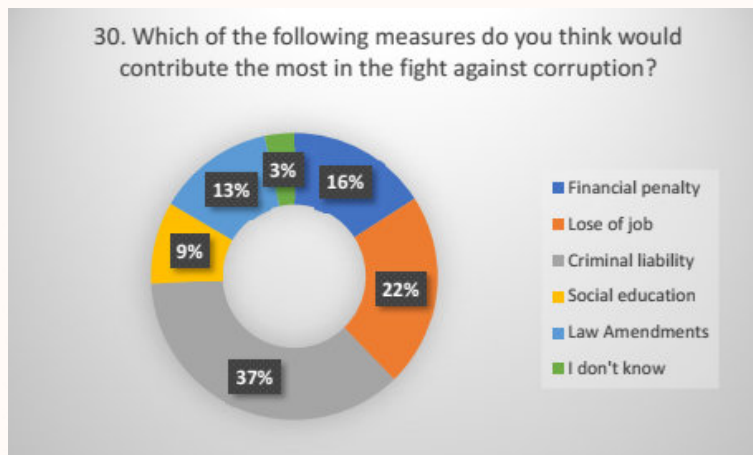
When asked if they would report corruption if they encountered it, respondents answered:

Yes, 39%, No 9%, Maybe 39% and, I don't know 13%. These answers indicate that there is a need for citizens to fight corruption and the percentage of those who hesitate or those who put "Maybe" need to serve as an incentive for institutions to improve their work and action, to act together in order to increase the number of people who would report. The data of 39% of those who would report corruption is not satisfactory because there is a need to strive for greater involvement of citizens in this significant problem.



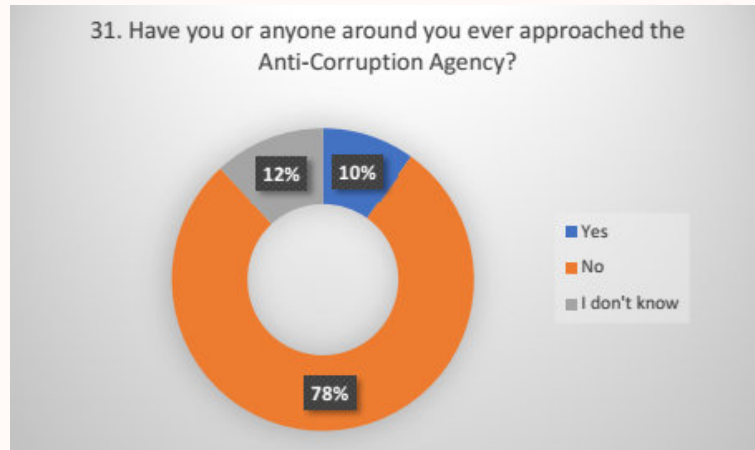
As an institution to turn to for help, the citizens put the Anti-Corruption Agency in the first place, then the Ombudsman Institution and the police in the third place. A quarter of the respondents answered that they did not know who to turn to, which speaks of the systemic distrust that both local and central institutions should work on. Greater visibility of the Agency is also needed on the ground in order to inform citizens about all available legal mechanisms for the fight against corruption.

Focus group participants praised the activities of the Ombudsperson Institution and noted that they remain reluctant to speak with the police on this issue.



As a measure that would most contribute to the suppression of corruption, citizens cited criminal liability or imprisonment of over 37%, followed by job loss of 22%, a financial penalty of 16%, and Law amendments of 13%. Respondents on this question also showed accordance with the data obtained from focus groups, which shows that corruption is not punishable, that is, that there are very few court verdicts for acts of corruption. Social education occupies the smallest percentage - 9%.

Focus group participants also lacked interest in education on this topic, which greatly confirms the necessity of the same.



When asked if they had ever contacted the Anti-Corruption Agency, only 10% responded affirmatively, which is not corresponding with the perception of corruption listed above. Such a small percentage of reports means distrust in the system, and that distrust must be resolved as soon as possible. It should also serve as a message to the Agency to better promote itself in northern Kosovo and inform citizens about its activities and scope of actions to bring its services and work closer to ordinary citizens.

Do you know of any civil society organization that has organized anti-corruption activities in Northern Kosovo?

About a quarter of respondents cited ACDC as an organization that organized anti-corruption activities in northern Kosovo. Apart from this organization, AKTIV is also mentioned with 8%, while the vast majority of respondents answered that they do not know about any anti-corruption activities, which implies that the work of organizations must improve in this field to reach more citizens. The civil sector must be more active in the social part and work together for changes in society on such burning issues. Focus group participants noted that existing activities are few and poorly covered by the media, so they are not widespread and therefore have no impact on the social situation in northern Kosovo.

Conclusion

This research concludes that corruption is a severe problem for citizens in northern Kosovo, to have a great awareness of it, but there is a lack of efficiency of institutions to deal with it. Citizens are insufficiently informed about the work of institutions, which they consider to be a considerable shortcoming. Apart from recognizing the problem, most citizens know who to turn to, only assuming that the anti-corruption system is insufficiently efficient, and in the case of reporting they will achieve nothing but harm themselves, so they do nothing out of fear. It is stated in the focus groups as one of the main reasons for not reporting corruption to competent authorities.

It is also very concerning that a high percentage of respondents have experienced corruption in institutions in northern Kosovo, as many as 49%. So many respondents had both direct and indirect experiences with corruption in northern Kosovo. Bearing in mind that in public opinion polls on such sensitive issues, some respondents do not share their sincere involvement, it is concluded that corruption is an issue that relevant institutions should take seriously and deal with systematically. This conclusion is related to the results obtained on the question of whether respondents would report corruption, where the answers are pretty divided, namely 39% of respondents would report corruption, and at the same time, other respondents would not inform against or are not sure whether to do so. Nonetheless, the fact that is encouraging is that respondents are aware of institutions to which corruption can be reported, and also to identify institutions that they believe have problems with corruption.

Systematic resolution of corruption can be achieved only through coordinated work and joint action of all institutions and citizens. Respondents identified this, and it is evident from their responses that both citizens and civil society organizations must influence the work and transparency of the institutions. In this regard, it is clear that the transparency of institutions is one of the main issues related to corruption in northern Kosovo. In that sense, increased transparency of institutions, as well as more intensive cooperation of institutions with citizens and civil society organizations, is a condition for reducing corruption, along with changing the perception of citizens about the existence of corruption in institutions in northern Kosovo.

Recommendations

Recommendations aimed at central level institutions

1. Increase the visibility of institutions and promote their work
2. Improve the information system on work and available services
3. Create better inter-institutional cooperation through innovative programs that will strengthen inter-institutional cooperation
4. Investigate the needs of citizens for additional measures to prevent corruption

Recommendations aimed at local level institutions

1. Increase the transparency of service work
2. Regularly inform citizens about available services and activities
3. Increase citizens' trust in institutions through targeted programs

Recommendations for civil society organizations

1. Greater activity on issues of importance to citizens
2. Increase the scope of action according to the needs of citizens
3. Increase the visibility of the activities
4. Create stronger cooperation with institutions and citizens
5. Create project proposals and activities using corruption research
6. Advocate for transparent and accountable publication of relevant information.